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Our Little Secrets

Baghdad's Green Zone Prompts Iraqi Fury

By Patrick Cockburn

The US army is paralyzing the heart of Baghdad as it builds ever more elaborate fortifications to protect its bases against suicide bombers.

"Do not enter or you will be shot," reads a notice attached to some razor wire blocking a roundabout at what used to be the entrance to the 14 July bridge over the Tigris. Only vehicles with permission to enter the Green Zone, where the occupation authorities have their headquarters, can now use it. Iraqis who want to cross the river must fight their way to another bridge through horrendous traffic jams.

Gigantic concrete slabs, like enormous gray tombstones, now block many roads in Baghdad. They are about 12 feet high and three feet across and for many Iraqis have become the unloved symbol of the occupation. Standing side by side, they form walls around the Green Zone and other US bases, with notices saying it is illegal to stop beside them.

It is the ever-expanding US bases and the increasing difficulties and dangers of their daily lives which make ordinary Iraqis dismiss declarations by President George Bush about transferring power to a sovereign Iraqi government as meaningless. As Mr Bush and Tony Blair were speaking this week about a new beginning for Iraq, the supply of electricity in the country has fallen from 12 hours a day to six hours. On Canal Street yesterday, close to the bombed-out UN headquarters, there was a two-mile long line of cars waiting to buy petrol.

Salahudin Mohammed al-Rawi, an engineer, dismisses the diplomatic maneuvers over Iraq at the UN in New York and the G8 meeting in Georgia as

(**Green Zone** *continued on page 2)*

Special Reagan Memorial Edition

Cartoon Bubbles and the Challenger

By ALEXANDER COCKBURN

They keep talking about Reagan being a "big picture" man, indifferent to petty detail. The phrase gives a false impression, as though Reagan looked out at the world as at some Cinemascope epic, a vast battlefield where, through those famous spectacles (one lens close-up, for speech reading, the other long-distance) he could assess the global balance of forces. Wrong. Reagan stayed awake only for the cartoons, where the global balance of forces were set forth in simple terms, in the tiffs between Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, or Tom and Jerry.

When he became president, and thus "commander in chief", the Joint Chiefs of Staffs mounted their traditional show-and-tell briefings for him, replete with simple charts and a senior general explicating them in simple terms. Reagan found these briefings way too complicated and dozed off.

The Joint Chiefs then set up a secret unit, staffed by cartoonists. The balance of forces were set forth in easily accessible caricature, with Soviet missiles the size of upended Zeppelins, pulsing on their launchpads, with the miniscule US ICBMs shrivelled in their bunkers. Little cartoon bubbles would contain the points the Joint Chiefs wanted to hammer into Reagan's brain, most of them no doubt to the effect that "we need more money". Reagan really enjoyed the shows and sometimes even asked for repeats.

I have boundless faith in the American people, but it was startling to see the lines of people sweating under a hot sun waiting to see Reagan's casket. How could any of them take the dreadful old faker seriously? The nearest thing to it I can think of is the hysteria over Princess Di. In its way, the "outpouring" reminds me of what, nearly 20 years ago, I termed "news spasms", expertly fuelled by the imagineers in the Reagan White House.

These spasms – Nuremberg rallies really – were totalitarian in structure and intent, obsessively monopolistic of newsprint and the airwaves, forcing a "national mood" of consensus, with Reagan (in this reprise, his casket) as master of ceremonies. Particularly memorable spasm events included the downing of KAL 007, the destruction of the US Marine barracks outside Beirut, the Achille Lauro hijackings and the explosion of the Challenger space shuttle of January 28, 1986.

In fact it was the White House that had doomed Christa McAuliffe and her companions to be burned alive in the plummeting Challenger. The news event required the Challenger to go into orbit and be flying over Congress while Reagan was delivering his state of the union address. He was to tilt his head upward and, presumably gazing through the long-distance half of his spectacles, send a presidential greeting to the astronauts.

On launch morning it was freezing in Florida and it looked as though the mission would be postponed.

But NASA was having its arm twisted by the White House to stay on schedule. The Challenger was launched with that notorious O-ring fatally compromised by the cold.

The day after the crash there was one brief news item in, I think, The Washington Post, about the possibility of pressure on NASA, then silence. The White House news managers successfully iced the story.

(**Reagan** *continued on page 5)*

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(**Green Zone** *continued from page 1)*
an irrelevant charade. He said: "At the end of the day they cannot cheat the Iraqi people because the Iraqis are in touch with the real situation on the ground."

For many people in Baghdad the real situation is very grim. Twenty years ago Abu Nawas Street on the Tigris used to be filled with restaurants serving mazgouf, a river fish grilled over an open wood fire and a traditional Baghdadi delicacy.

These days Abu Nawas is largely deserted and is used mainly by American armored vehicles thundering down the road. Shahab al-Obeidi is the manager of the Shatt al-Arab restaurant, where dark gray fish swim in a circular pond decorated with blue tiles. They may survive a long time. Mr Obeidi confesses that business is not good. These days Abu Nawas can only be entered from one direction and culminates in an American checkpoint.

We asked to see the owner of the restaurant and Mr Obeidi explained that he "fled to Syria 40 days ago after his son was kidnapped and he had to pay $20,000 to get him back". A problem, frequently mentioned by Iraqis, is that US security measures appear to be solely directed at providing security for Americans. For Iraqis, life in Baghdad is still very dangerous.Mr Obeidi said that "in the past 75 per cent of our business was in the evening". Now he closes the Shatt al-Arab at 6pm and goes home. One night he stayed open a little later for some customers who were having a good time, but when he presented the bill they responded by pulling out their pistols and firing volleys of shots into the ceiling and through the windows. Mr Obeidi pointed to numerous bullet holes still awaiting repair.

The reason why Abu Nawas is sealed off is that at the end of the street are the Palestine and Sheraton hotels, where many foreign company employees as well as journalists stay. A few hundred yards away is Sadoun Street, once a main four-lane artery in central Baghdad, but now reduced to two lanes opposite a side street leading to the Baghdad Hotel. This was attacked by a suicide bomber last year, without much damage to the hotel, which was universally believed by Iraqi taxi drivers to be a center for the CIA. About 30 shops within the cordon sanitaire around the hotel now face ruin. Nadim al- Hussaini, who has a shop selling large air conditioners, says: "My business has completely disappeared, first 30 to 40 per cent when they put up a concrete barrier and 100 per cent when they closed the road." In theory he should get compensation from the Coalition Provisional Authority, but so far he has seen no sign of it.

Next door, Zuhaar Tuma owns a cafe which is not so badly affected because he still has his regular customers, smoking hubble-bubble pipes and playing dominoes. He was a little more understanding about why the road had been closed, saying: "I don't want to get blown up any more than the Americans do. But the real solution is simply for the Americans staying at the hotel to leave it."

The same could be said of the thousands of American officials and soldiers in central Baghdad. Had they based themselves on the outskirts of the capital they would have been less visible. But, cut off as they are in their compounds from real Iraqi life, they probably do not know and may not care about the sea of resentment that surrounds them.

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Troy, Now and Then

By Jeffrey St. Clair

"The true hero, the true subject, the center of the Iliad, is force. Force as man's instrument, force as man's master, force before which human flesh shrinks back. The human soul, in this poem, is shown always in its relation to force; swept away, blinded by the force it thinks it can direct, bent under the pressure of the force to which it is subjected. Those who had dreamed that force, thanks to progress, now belonged to the past, have seen the poem as a historic document; those who can see that force, today as in the past, is at the center of all human history, find in the Iliad its most beautiful, its purest mirrorforce is what makes the person subjected to it into a thing."

Simone Weill, *L'Iliad ou le Poeme de la Force*, 1939

Like Briseis dragged off to Agamemnon's tent, I was hauled down the road and forced to watch Troy...the movie.

Even before the opening credits had finished their scroll, it dawned on me (with not-quite-rosy-fingers) that the director, Wolfgang Peterson, was not working from the Richmond Lattimore translation of blind Homer's epic recounting the rage of Achilles and the collateral damage left in his wake. But that's fine by me. Lattimore's interpretation of Homer may be the liveliest rendition in the English language, but I'd read it so many times there was nothing new to be gleaned from the story. And besides I prefer Alexander Pope's version, executed in the merciless march of heroic couplets. Alas, no couplets here, either--heroic or otherwise.

I fully expected to be able to watch this film unfold in my sleep. But imagine my surprise when Menelaus (who started the whole mess after he refused to take the herbal concoction that passed for Viagra in the Hellenistic period in order to keep his young and randy bride happy) and mighty Ajax got whacked in the first major fracas between the forces of the Peloponnese and Ilium. Major characters getting axed in the first reel. Was this the Iliad or The Sopranos?

By the way, in Homer's account red-bearded Menelaus (perhaps kin of the Wandering Celt, who had found his way down to sunny Lacedaemon), is the only fair-skinned person in the whole sweeping drama, aside from "white-armed" Hera. In Peterson's version, all the players look like they stepped out of an audition for a remake of Bergman's Wild Strawberries and, for some reason, utter their lines in mock-Elizabethan accents, like players in a production of Titus Andronicus as staged in Pocatello.

My spirits lifted immediately. With Ajax and Menelaus dead, perhaps now the Trojans had a fighting chance! Think how history could have changed. The enchanting Trojan women would be saved from their cruel fate. Aeneas, burdened by the weight of Anchises, wouldn't have to flee the burning citadel. The Roman Empire would never rise, decline and fall. The Etruscans would still control Tuscany...instead of the

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British ruling class.

After all, it was Ajax (Big Ajax...not Lil' Ajax, the Mini-Me of the Iliad) who kept the Achaeans in the game, slicing and dicing through the vaulting lines of Trojans, nearly extinguishing Hektor himself, while sulky Achilles pouted in his tent. Perhaps they had to knock off Ajax, because he made Brad Pitt's Achilles look puny, a kind of Goldilocks among the warriors, not at all the killing machine tutored in the arts of torture and terror by Chiron the Centaur. (If you're interested in these archaic matters, check out Pasolini's Medea, my favorite film of the Greek myths, where Pier Paulo himself appears as the pedagogical man-horse, who runs the equivalent of a School of the Americas for Greek superheroes on Mt. Pelion, here training Jason in the finer points of imperial conquest, pacification and betrayal.)

And with impotent Menelaus dead, couldn't the long-haired Argives decamp from the malarial banks of the Scamander, climb aboard their black ships and sail home across the merlot-darkened seas anyway? Given the navigational skills demonstrated by Odysseus, they could use the head start. What was the point in staying now that Helen's cuckolded husband had been eviscerated? Even Peterson nods.

But what about this scrimpy Helen? She looks like a run-of-the-mill cheerleader from North Dakota sporting a sour smile. Monica Vitti displayed more zest in L'Avventura, Michelangelo Antonioni's Odyssey of Ennui. Are we really meant to believe that this girl is the issue of that momentous encounter between Leda and the Swan? That this SPF 30 waif had trysted with Theseus and descended into the Underworld and back? That her anorexic features had already borne two children, then launched a thousand ships and the first clash of civilizations?

So on it went, laying siege to narrative expectations at every turn.

Fine with me. I came to see Aphrodite, anyway. I'd always envisioned Claudia Cardinale in the role. But where was the Goddess of Love, who famously shielded silly Paris from lethal arrows? Do the gods flit around in subliminal cuts, secretly manipulating the action? Do I have to buy the DVD for the Olympian extras? Apparently, the real Weapons of Mass Destruction (dirty bombs have nothing on Hera in a rage) have gone missing on the plains of Ilium.

The absence of the meddling divinities makes Ajax's early death all the more puzzing. After all he is the fiercest fighter in the Iliad and the only major character who performs his exploits of grim glory without divine assistance. Imagine Bush and his coop of neocon chickenhawks waging their wars without invoking their technological deities: cruise missiles (Apollo, "who strikes from afar"), SDI and Patriot missile batteries (Athene's cloak of invincibility) and MOAB bombs (Poseidon, "the Earth-shaker.")

Then I started scratching my head about Patroclus. In Achilles and Patroclus, Homer presents us with the first openly gay-and-proud-of-it couple in western literature. But what's this? He and Achilles are suddenly revealed to be cousins? Kissing cousins? Is that legal in San Francisco now?

Well, I'd set these and other nagging issues aside and began to properly mourn the death of my boyhood hero Hektor, breaker of horses, whose body had been put through the ringer by Achilles, thus providing a model for the corpse abuse at Abu Ghraib. Some things never change. I was lamenting the looting of Troy, thinking that the Greeks would get theirs with the theft of the Elgin Marbles, when, surprise, grumpy Agamemnon, the Rumsfeld of the invasion of Ilium, gets offed.

This was a twist worthy of Hitchcock,

With Ajax and Menelaus dead, perhaps now the Trojans had a fighting chance!

himself. Wasn't the King supposed to claim that howling naysayer Cassandra as his concubine and zigzag his way back to Sparta? Speaking of Sparta, when did it become a "port"? Is this the post-global warming version? (Cockburn will never swallow *that* emendation.) Adieu Agamemnon, murderous son of Atreus, who killed his own daughter, roasted her on a tripod and gorged on her flesh as a sacrifice to abet his war prospects. Three millennia later, a faceless war lord in the Bush administration would similarly sacrifice the CIA agent Valerie Plame, though Agamemnon at least took credit for his foul deed. The code of the conqueror has changed.

Still, I couldn't help thinking about poor Clytemnestra, waiting back in Mycenae, sharpening those knives, forever denied her moment of fame and terrible justice. Oh, well, I guess W. Peterson doesn't have any intention of filming a sequel based on the works of Aeschylus or Euripedes. Perhaps, he couldn't negotiate the rights.

I left the theater strangely satisfied that Homer's heroes, however reshaped by the Gods of Hollywood, had made such an unexpected return at a time when the rebels against the Empire, under the forceful grip of its own Lil' Ajax, need them most.

I'm looking forward to Oliver Stone's forthcoming Alexander the Great, where the conspiracy behind the death of the charismatic conqueror, who slept with a copy of the Iliad beneath his pillow and was named after the instigator of the Trojan war, will finally be revealed.

Did someone say, Aristotle did it?

WHEN REAGAN WAS KING AND AIDS WAS RAGING

White House Press Briefing by Larry Speakes, October 15, 1982.

Q: Larry, does the President have any reaction to the announcement by the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, that AIDS is now an epidemic and [with] over 600 cases?

MR. SPEAKES: What's AIDS?

Q: Over a third of them have died. It's known as "gay plague." (Laughter.) No, it is. I mean it's a pretty serious thing that one in every three people that get this have died. And I wondered if the President is aware of it?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't have it. Do you? (Laughter.)

Q: No, I don't.

MR. SPEAKES: You didn't answer my question.

Q: Well, I just wondered, does the President...

MR. SPEAKES: How do you know? (Laughter.)

Q: In other words, the White House looks on this as a great joke?

MR. SPEAKES: No, I don't know anything about it, Lester.

Q: Does the President, does anyone in the White House know about this epidemic, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't think so. I don't think there's been any...

Q: Nobody knows?

MR. SPEAKES: There has been no personal experience here, Lester.

Q: No, I thought you were keeping...

MR. SPEAKES: I checked thoroughly with Dr. Ruge this morning and he's had no - (laughter) - no patients suffering from AIDS or whatever it is. CP

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Ronald Reagan's Nature:

Will the Earth Accept His Corpse?

By Jeffrey St Clair

In early October of 1983, I found myself at the old Weir Cook airport in Indianapolis awaiting the arrival of David Brower, the great environmentalist. Brower emerged from the plane, his face aglow with impish triumph. We hustled down the terminal to the airport bar where he imparted the momentous news that his nemesis James Watt, the messianic Secretary of Interior, had just been evicted from his post in the Reagan administration.

Watt had doomed himself by denouncing the members of the federal coal-leasing commission as "a black, a woman, two Jews and a cripple." The commissioners had shown the audacity to resist Watt's demented shale-oil scheme, which sought to transform the Great Plains into a moonlike landscape of craters and toxic slush ponds. So like Earl Butz before him, Watt's political obituary was written with a racist slur. It's probably fitting that he fell from such a self-inflicted trifle. After all, he was an instinctive and unrepentant bigot, just like his boss Ronnie. Ask any Apache.

Of course, the apostle of strip-mining from Wyoming nearly lost his job over another bone-headed misdemeanor: his attempt to bar the Beach Boys from performing at a July 4 concert on the National Mall. Reagan had to intervene personally on behalf of that All-American band, whose music could have provided the soundtrack for the sunny brand of trickle-down utopianism the president was trying to force-feed the country in those days. The Gipper, who, if nothing else, always demonstrated a keen pr sense, may well have lost confidence in Watt at that precise moment.

But the Interior Secretary, who once declared that the end of the Earth was so close at hand that there was no reason to fret about conserving ecosystems for the long haul, had been on the ropes from the beginning of his tenure, due in large part to the Dump Watt campaign initiated by Brower and his group Friends of the Earth only weeks after Watt's nomination was confirmed by the US senate. Within a few months, Friends of the Earth had gathered more than two million signatures on a petition calling for Watt's removal.

In those days, the right to petition the government still seemed to stand for something. Brower loathed Watt, but viewed him as a comical figure, a corrupt moralist sprung from the pages of a Thackeray novel. He reserved his real animosity for the appalling Reagan, the supreme Confidence Artist of American politics.

Brower never wrote off Reagan as an incompetent and incoherent stooge. He knew better. Brower, the archdruid, and Reagan, the union-busting snitch, had sparred with each other across the decades_first in California over parks and wild rivers, pesticide spraying, nuclear power and the governor's brutal attacks on the citizens of Brower's hometown of Berkeley; and later around the globe over wilderness, endangered species, the war on Nicaragua and the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Brower, the archdruid, and Reagan, the union-busting snitch, had sparred with each other across the decades

During the pitched battles to save some of the world's largest trees, Brower and his cohorts goaded Reagan into making his notorious declaration: "Once you've seen one redwood, you've seen them all." That pretty much summed up Reagan's philosophy of environmental tokenism. Later, Reagan advanced the thesis that trees generated more air pollution than coal-fired power plants. For the Gipper, the only excuse for Nature was to serve as a backdrop for photo-ops, just like in his intros for *Death Valley Days*.

Brower viewed Reagan as a mean-spirited and calculating figure, entirely cognizant of and culpable for his crimes. He refused to allow the old man access to the twin escape hatches of plausible deniablity and senile dementia. Born a year apart, the two men were part of the same generation and both had spent most of their lives in California. Yet, the tenor of their lives couldn't have been more different. In World War II Brower served as an instructor for the famous 10th Mountain Division and returned home a pacifist. He didn't talk much about his war experience, preferring to brag about the number of Sierran peaks he'd bagged (70 first ascents) or the wild rivers he'd floated.

Reagan spent World War II in Hollywood making racist propaganda films to inflame the fever for a war that tens of thousands of others would die fighting in. Years later he boasted (that is: lied) about liberating the Nazi death camps, even as he was forced to defend his bizarre decision to bestow presidential honors on the dead at the cemetery in Bitburg, Germany, final resting place for some blood-drenched members of the Waffen SS. Reagan possessed a special talent for the suspension of disbelief when it came to the facts of his own life. Perhaps, if the Earth in Simi Valley refuses to receive his corpse, the custodians of Bitburg could erect a cenotaph for Reagan on those chilly grounds.

After a couple of hours spent draining Tangueray-powered martinis at that airport bar in Indianapolis, some of the initial glow gradually dissipated from Brower's face. "You know, Jeffrey, we may soon come to miss old Watt," Brower predicted.

He was right, of course. James Watt proved to be the greatest fundraising asset the big environmental groups ever stumbled across, far outperforming panda calendars and postcards of baby Harp seals about to fall victim to the fur-trader's skull-crushing club. During Watt's tenure, the top 10 environmental groups more than doubled their combined budgets and for a brief time became the most powerful public interest lobby on the Hill.

Watt's approach to the plunder of the planet steamed with an evangelical fervor. He brought with him to Washington a gang of libertarian missionaries, mostly veterans of the Coors-funded Mountain States Legal Foundation, who referred to themselves as the Colorado Crazies. Their mission: privatize the public estate. Many of them were transparent crooks who ended up facing indictment and doing time in federal prison for self-dealing and public corruption. They gave away billions in public timber, coal and oil to favored corporations, leaving behind toxic scars where there used to be wild forests, trout streams and deserts. These thieves were part of the same claque of race-baiting

(**Watt** *continued on page 6*)

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Dame Quigley, the Reagan's preferred astrologer, was in her policy advice a benign counterweight to Jeane Kirkpatrick.

(**Reagan** *continued from page 1*)

It wasn't until October 5, 1986, the day of the crash in Nicaragua of Eugene Hasenfus's plane, carrying documents linking him to officials including vice president George Bush and to an arms smuggling operation, that the press gave Reagan any sort of a hard time.

Back at the start of 1983 Reagan authorized a disinformation campaign, calling for a "public diplomacy" campaign superintended by the NSC and "designed to generate support for our national security objectives". This propaganda program surfaced eight days after Hasenfus crashed, by Alfonso Chardy, a terrific reporter working for the Miami Herald, who got many scoops around that time.

The press would buy any threat from the Reaganites, no matter how preposterous. Grenada "lay athwart vital US sea lanes", thus threatening all trans-Atlantic trade. Libya, the press trumpeted on cue from the White House in late 1981, had sent a team of assassins south across the Canadian border to murder Reagan. During the Iran/Contragate hearings it came out that the disseminator of these fairy tales was an Israeli agent and the CIA had known all along the story was false.

It was all part of the long effort to demonize Qaddafi which culminated in the bombing raid on Libya by F-111s of April 14, 1986. The raid was timed to coincide with the tv evening newscasts , with a Pentagon press release readied to announce Qaddafi's accidental death. The missiles aimed at his living quarters killed his 18-month old adopted daughter, Hana.

Reagan loved to trumpet the threat of the "Soviet-supplied and trained" Nicaraguan army rampaging north through Honduras, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico before descending like a wolf on the fold, in this case Harlingen, Texas, with Corpus Christi prostrate in its path a few score miles north up state highway 77.

These were the glory days of the "threat inflaters", practitioners of the dark art like Robert Moss, Clare Sterling and Arnaud de Borchgrave, along with the dragoons in Paul Nitze's Committee on the President Danger.

The press dutifully relayed their fantasies, even the very mad one about a Nicaraguan invasion.

Another rich fantasy of the Threat Inflaters, that there was a vast "civil defense gap", to the advantage of the Soviet Union. At a given signal from the Kremlin a large proportion of the Soviet population would vanish like moles into subterranean shelters and emerge in the post-holocaust world, presumably to cross the sea and till the irradiated acres of the Midwest on which they might live, until they moved into beach front property in Southern California, welcomed by such film quislings as had survived the McCarthy years.

Reagan's mind was a wastebasket of old clippings from Popular Science, SF magazines (the origin of Star Wars) lines from movies and homely saws from the Reader's Digest and the Sunday supplements. He had a stout belief in astrology, the stars being the twinkling penumbra of his incandescent belief in the "free market," with whose motions it was blasphemous to tamper.

Astrologers exulted when they saw his visit to Bitburg was timed to coincide with a concurrence of a full moon while at its perigree with the earth, along with a total eclipse of the moon. Elsewhere in the heavens Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto appeared to move retrograde. The same four planets appeared retrograde a year later when Reagan bombed Libya. This being said, Dame Quigley, the Reagans' preferred astrologer, in her policy advice was a benign counterweight to Jeane Kirkpatrick and the other berserkers.

Of course Reagan believed Armageddon was right around the corner, and would probably arrive "in our lifetime". He also believed tomato ketchup could be classified as a school lunch, striking back at the nose-candy crowd who, as Stevie Earle once said, spent the 70s trying to get cocaine classified as a vegetable.

Hearing all the warm and fuzzy talk about the Gipper, young people spared the experience of his awful sojourn in office, probably imagine him as a kindly, avuncular figure. He was a vicious man, with a breezy indifference to suffering and the consequences of decisions. This indifference was so profound that Dante would surely have consigned him to one of the lowest circles of hell, to roast for all eternity in front of a malfunctioning tv set and a dinner tray swinging out of reach like the elusive fruits that tortured Tantalus. And talking of torture, there wasn't a torturer in Latin America who didn't raise a cheer when Reagan was elected even though Carter hadn't cramped their style particularly. They were right to exult. In Guatemala, Rios Montt plunged into his butchery of 200,000 Mayans. David Rockefeller made haste to Buenos Aires to tell the generals that with Reagan's election a new era of understanding had been launched.

A CIA-inspired torture manual surfaced from El Salvador, though the US press made little of it at the time. RENAMO perpetrated ghastly massacres in Mozambique, as did Savimbi's UNITA in Angola, spurred on and paid for by Reagan's men.

Reagan hailed the contra murderers attacking Nicaragua as the "moral equivalent of the founding fathers" (an assessment with which the Iroquois would have readily agreed). Fresh from honoring the SS men buried in Bitburg he went two days later to Spain where he declared that the Lincoln Brigaders and the defenders of the Republic had fought on the wrong side.

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(**Reagan** *continued from page 5)*

He was surrounded by scoundrels large and small. Probably the worst was William Casey, head of the CIA, and an out-and-out crook, who stood at the head of a vast cavalcade of fringe players, all the way down to the Neocons who flocked to his standard.

I pulled Reagan's hair once, in the company of the late Murray Kempton. It was in 1976 when he ran for the Republican nomination. There was unkind talk in the press about him dying his hair, possibly even wearing a toupee. His handlers made him and his hair available for inspection in New York, and we stood in line to take a close look for traces of dye or a hairpiece.

I gave his thick thatch of apparently genuine hair a tug to make sure. He took it calmly, as placid as a cow in a country fair. I'm sure that if I'd asked to check his teeth he'd have opened up, right on cue. I never saw him being "sunny," a favorite adjective of the hagiographers.

As an orator or "communicator" he was terrible, with one turgid cliché following another, delivered in a folksy drone. His range of rhetorical artifice was terribly limited.

He was an awful President, never as popular as the press pretended, presiding over a carnival of corruption and greed. On March 23, 1983, a friend of mine watched as a naval officer and a defense contractor in the Fort Myer Officers' Club in Virginia listened impatiently as Reagan churned his way through a longish overture to his excited launch of Star Wars.

Then, as Reagan began to token forth the billion-dollar feeding trough of SDI, they screamed to each other in incredulous delight, "He's going to do it … he's doing it … he's done it! We're rich, we're rich!" With these words, they both made a rush to the telephones.

The blue-collars who thought Reagan was their guy didn't do well in his two terms, any more than the poor did, despite oceans of drivel last week about the Reagan boom lifting all boats. So far as individual wage earners are concerned, the real median wage for the bottom 20 per cent of earners was $7.20 an hour in 1981 when he entered the White House and $7.14 an hour when he left in l989. (By 2001, after the Clinton boom it was at $8.07.)

Reagan's rhetoric was anti-government, but in fact he was pressing programmatically for a different use of government power, in which the major corporations would occupy a much stronger position. The tendencies he presided over were probably inevitable, given the balance of political forces after the postwar boom hit the ceiling in the late 1960s.

Then it was a matter of triage, as the rich made haste to consolidate their position. It was a straight line from Reagan's crude attacks on welfare queens to Clinton's compassionate chewings of the lip (same head wag as RR's) as he swore to "end welfare as we know it".

As a pr man, it was Reagan's role, as it was Thatcher's, to reassure the wealthy and the privileged that not only might but right was on their side. He installed fantasy as the motor of national consciousness, and it's still pumping disastrously along. CP

(**Watt** *continued from page 4)*

zealots who demonized welfare mothers as swindlers of the public treasury.

Watt, who was himself charged with 25 felony counts of lying and obstruction of justice, never hid his savage agenda behind soft, made-for-primetime rhetoric. He never preached about win-win solutions, ecological forestry or sustainable development. From the beginning, James Watt's message was clear: grab it all, grab it now. God wills it so. The message was so high-pitched and unadulterated that it provoked a fierce global resistance that frustrated Watt at nearly every turn. In the end, he achieved almost nothing for the forces of darkness.

Soon, Watt's divinely-inspired vigilantism against nature would be replaced by a more calculating approach, a kinder and gentler path to exploitation, that reached a terrible crescendo under Clinton and Gore, a team which, according to Brower's expert calculation, did more damage to the American environment in their first four years in office than Reagan and Bush I accomplished in 12 years.

So there's reason to miss Watt and Reagan. Their brazen contempt for the world inspired ordinary people to rise up against the leaders of their government on behalf of the spotted owl and Yellowstone grizzly--rise up, and on occasion, actually rout them.

Today even Watt's minions, like Steven Griles and Gale Norton, now directing the berserker environmental policies of the Bush 2 administration, don't ride nearly as tall in the saddle as Reagan and Watt did in the early 1980s, when it seemed that real demons stalked the earth. CP

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